

LOUISIANA PUBLIC DEFENDER BOARD



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EQUAL JUSTICE FOR ALL

BATON ROUGE – Today the National Legal Aid & Defender Association (NLADA) released its report of the 15th JDC Public Defender's Office. The 15th JDC includes Acadia, Vermillion and Lafayette parishes.

LPDB contracted with the National Legal Aid & Defender Association to conduct an evaluation of the 15th JDC Public Defender's Office after a formal complaint was submitted to LPDB by the ACLU of Louisiana, raising concerns about the limited use of investigators and other quality of defense issues that may be breaching defendants' constitutional right to counsel. This evaluation was conducted in September 2009.

The report, *"Effective Assistance of Counsel: Implementing the Louisiana Public Defender Act of 2007 Evaluation of Public Defense Services and Operations in Louisiana's 15th Judicial District Indigent Defense System"*, identifies problems in the structure and performance of the 15th JDC Public Defender Office and faults LPDB for failing to adequately intercept and remedy these issues. Principally among the report's criticism is the lack of a meaningful contract between the District Defender and LPDB.

Frank Neuner, Chairman of the Board said, "This report rightly prioritizes the critical task of developing contracts with our District Defenders – not only for ensuring that eligible clients in Louisiana receive timely, qualified access to counsel, but to uphold our commitment to bring efficiency and fiscal responsibility to the public defense component of the criminal justice system. The Board and staff expect to have contracts with all District Defenders in Louisiana by the end of September and believe this is perhaps the most impactful step we can take to improve the performance and efficiency of public defense in all districts."

LPDB was created in 2007 as a single state entity charged with supervising, training and managing financial and caseload information for the 42 judicial district public defender's office. This task was previously undertaken by 41 local indigent defender boards.

Trial-Level Compliance Officer John Di Giulio said, "Because the Louisiana Constitution requires 'a uniform system of securing and compensating qualified counsel for indigents', LPDB faces the enormous challenge of not only improving the quality of defense in select districts facing the threat of litigation, but in all districts. Our new, small agency

must simultaneously work to secure funding to create and implement uniform standards in all public defense offices, while simultaneously accommodating the district-by-district diversity of criminal justice practices in Louisiana.”

At the root, all of the problems cited in the report – both at the local and the state level – are the result of chronically inadequate funding for the defense function. Local offices lack the resources required to comply with national and state standards for public defense and the 15-person state agency lacks the capacity to adequately supervise 42 district public defender offices, 8 contract programs, implement a first-ever state-wide training program, produce monthly and annual reports to the Legislature, participate in collaborative projects with other criminal justice agencies, and complete many other statutory mandates.

LPDB is an executive branch agency located in the Office of the Governor. It has seven full-time executive staff, including the State Public Defender, Deputy Director of Juvenile Services, Deputy Director of Training, Budget Officer, Information Technology & Management Officer, Trial-Level Compliance Officer and Juvenile Justice Compliance Officer.